



The Great North Road *The Convict Trail* Thomas James Bridge

The Great North Road is a 240km convict built masterpiece constructed between 1826 and 1836 to provide an overland route from Sydney to Newcastle and the Hunter Valley. Much of the original convict built road remains in use today, although a lot of the original surface is well buried beneath bitumen. Convict built remains, such as stone retaining walls, pick dressed cuttings, culverts, bridges and stone cut drains, can be seen when driving along the road, or when walking in Dharug and Yengo National Parks.



Thomas James Bridge with large stones; View from road; Evidence of quarrying; Steep slope of the surrounding area

Thomas James Bridge

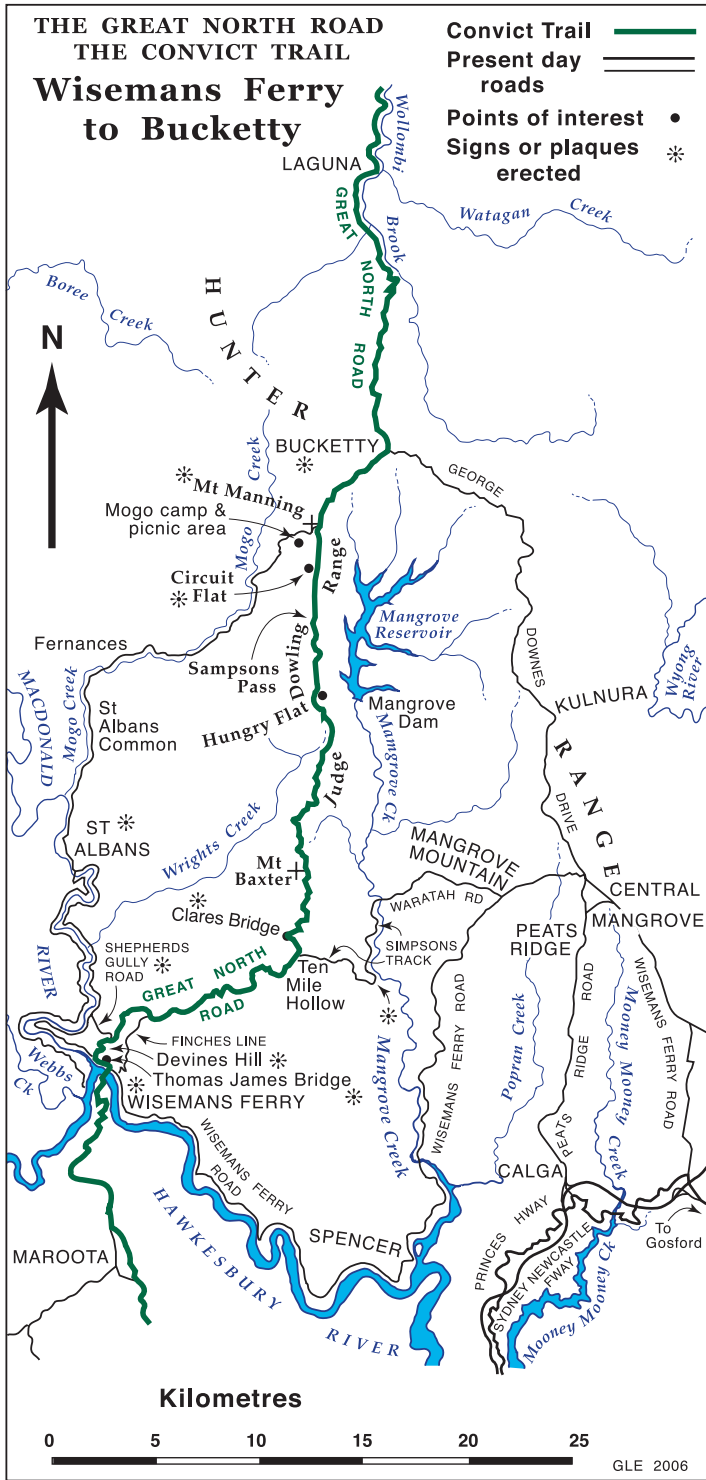
Thomas James Bridge built in 1830 is the oldest in-use bridge on mainland Australia. This simple single span timber bridge deck is supported by massive stone abutments. Built in 1830 on the north side of the Hawkesbury River at Wisemans Ferry it lies between the Ferry and the National Park entrance just west of the ferry.

The stone to build this bridge was quarried from the surrounding hill side and worked on site. Some large stones lying at the head of the gully show evidence of the quarrying and splitting of stones. The stone was all quarried and cut and moved into place by hand. It forms a 16.3 metre long channel along the banks of the creek. Modern concrete headstocks help spread the load over the 1830 masonry abutments.

The stone abutments are 6 metres high and sloped and flared at the base. Wing walls extend from the abutments along the river side edge of the road supporting it for 8 metres along the northern side and 30 metres to the south.

The skilfully designed bridge was built with two stone culverts within the uphill side of the abutments. These culverts have flagged and walled races to catch the water tumbling down the cliff face and direct it in to the main channel, thus protecting the stone work.

As no plans or direct correspondence about this bridge exists, it is not known who designed it. It was probably designed by Percy Simpson who was in charge of building this section of road.



We do know who was responsible for overseeing the actual work - Thomas James, the overseer in charge of the 25 Road Party (the men who built the bridge). He was a Ticket of Leave overseer.

We have only found scant information about him. Thomas James arrived in NSW onboard the convict ship Recovery in 1819 when he was 24, sentenced to life. By 1824 he was in the Bathurst road party stationed at Richmond, then later was transferred to Road Party 25 at Wisemans Ferry. By 1830 he had obtained his Ticket of Leave and was the Overseer of the Road Party 25. By 1837 he was living at Penrith and in 1842 obtained a Conditional Pardon. So far nothing more is known about him.

Thomas James was obviously a skillful overseer who could inspire the convicts to produce high quality work, the bridge named after him shows this. Road Party 25 that built this bridge was responsible for some excellent work and the bridge party that built Clares Bridge was formed from Road Party 25.

The Great North Road bridges form an extremely significant group of bridges that demonstrate the development from a simple stone conduit structure such as this to the highly sophisticated forms and designs used at Clares and Circuit Flat bridges.

A visit to Thomas James Bridge can be combined with visits to several other sections of the Great North Road.

THE CONVICT TRAIL

The Convict Trail is the name for The Great North Road, the surrounding land, and historic buildings. The Convict Trail Project Inc. (CTP) is a community based organisation with objectives of the care, protection and promotion of the Great North Road.

To achieve its objectives the CTP works with many partners, including the NSW Heritage Office, councils, Dept. of Corrective Services, NPWS, RTA & local tourism associations. The Project brings together community groups, individual members, tourism groups, State Government agencies and local councils including both Baulkham and Hornsby Councils. For more information, including "conservation partners" visit the CTP website.

This brochure is part of a series of area specific electronic brochures available from the Convict Trail website. The content of this brochure has been compiled in good faith but is published without responsibility in law or otherwise for its accuracy and without any assumption of duty of care by the Convict Trail Project. The sites are listed to allow you to appreciate how much evidence remains and what is supporting the road you are driving on.

Thomas James Bridge is a bridge on a busy road, it carries the road across a stream that rushes down a very steep slope. The rocks can be very slippery. You should only view and photograph the bridge from safe level locations.

For extra information purchase an "Explore the Convict Trail" booklet or visit the Convict Trail Website www.convicttrail.org.

New members welcome.
**Write to: CTP, 7 Coolabah Close,
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Views of Thomas James Bridge from various angles